DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 353 666 EA 024 599

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TITLE Using Community-Wide Collaboration To Foster Resiliency in Kids: A Conceptual Framework.
INSTITUTION Western Regional Center for Drug-Free Schools and Communities, Portland, OR.
SPONS AGENCY Department of Education, Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Oct 92
CONTRACT S188A00001
NOTE 17p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Advocacy; *Child Welfare; *Community Programs; Community Support; Competence; *Educational Cooperation; Elementary Secondary Education; Family School Relationship; High Risk Students; Models; Prevention; *School Community Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Resilience (Personality)

ABSTRACT

Collaboration as an effective means for developing resiliency in children is examined in this document. The first section summarizes findings of literature on collaboration to develop a new paradigm based on the following features: obtaining community ownership; developing and utilizing people's strengths; and actively engaging children. Collaborators are being challenged not only to improve service delivery, but also to engage youth as resources, strengthen families, and empower communities. The second section describes the resiliency framework, which attempts to build environments that protect youth from succumbing to high-risk behaviors. The framework recognizes the critical roles of all adults in the child's environment, emphasizes improving the environment rather than children's behaviors, and builds on participants' strengths and capacities. The third section demonstrates how the principles of the resiliency framework can improve collaborators' effectiveness. Some tools, models, and programs are highlighted in the fourth section. The appendix provides information on additional tools, guides, and publications. (Contains 25 references.) (LMI)

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Using Community-Wide Collaboration to Foster Resiliency in Kids:

A Conceptual Framework

By Robert Linquanti *

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Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development

October 1992

* The author wishes to thank Bonnie Benard for several valuable conversations on the themes of this article, and Bethann Berliner for her helpful comments on earlier drafts of the text.

For those involved in delivering and improving effective services for children, collaboration is an idea whose time has come. With the growing awareness that our fragmented delivery of services to families and children has been underachieving at best, collaboration across agencies has quickly become a key strategy to try to improve program effectiveness and outcomes.

In addition to collaboration, preventionists have heard much in the past two years about protective factors and how these can foster resiliency in kids confronting multiple risks. A growing body of research suggests that development of particular attributes in kids by promoting and enhancing protective factors in their environments is as important, necessary, and effective for their healthy development as reducing the risk factors threatening their futures.

Together, collaboration and resiliency have a powerful synergy that can greatly benefit children. By applying the conceptual framework of resiliency to our collaborative efforts, families and communities become vital participants in improving their own lives, and their strengths, capacities, and assets become valuable resources. Collaborations that focus on fostering resiliency can engage and involve all members of the community in building an environment rich in protective factors to enable youth to overcome risks and develop into healthy adults. In this way, collaboration can become an effective means to foster resiliency in kids.

In what follows, we'll briefly summarize some of the key conclusions from the vast and growing literature on collaboration, and show how collaborators are being challenged not just to improve service delivery, but also to engage youth as resources, strengthen families, and empower communities through the collaborative process. Next we'll review the resiliency framework, and describe how resiliency-based collaborations help us to meet these challenges and better protect children and youth from succumbing to high-risk behaviors. We'll also show how the guiding principles of the resiliency framework itself can make collaborators more effective. Finally, we'll highlight some tools, models, and programs that can help preventionists collaborate to promote resiliency in the lives of children and youth.

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COLLABORATIONS WITHIN A PARADIGM SHIFT: A MEANS TO WHAT END?

There has been a veritable campaign during the past three years to better understand collaboration, reflecting the many efforts to use it to improve, if not transform, our current system of fragmented services. This system's shortcomings are well-documented: reactive crisis management precludes prevention and early intervention; rigid, category-driven programs focus on treating symptoms rather than their underlying root causes; and lack of communication, coordination, and proximity among agencies serving children and families creates a bureaucratic obstacle course of protocols and prerequisites which virtually assures service gaps, duplication, and ineffective outcomes. (Melaville & Blank 1991, Gardner 1989, Hodgkinson, 1989).

Thus collaborative efforts have been driven largely by a conceptual framework of integrating services to fight fragmentation, with the goal of better orchestrating accessible, comprehensive services to meet the interrelated needs of children and families. In the many interagency efforts to link existing programs and integrate services, collaborators across agencies are overcoming structural and technical challenges through better inter-organizational communication and employee cross-training, joint planning and resource pooling, co-location of services and simplified eligibility and confidentiality requirements (Blank & Lombardi, 1992; Greenberg & Levy, 1992; Guthrie & Guthrie, 1991, Schorr, Both, & Copple, 1991).

But what we are learning, and in a sense knew all along, is that interagency collaboration, though worthy and necessary, is insufficient to realize our ultimate vision. As Lisbeth Schorr recently warned, we must not become "so absorbed by the difficulty and complexity of what we are trying to change at the system level, that we lose sight of the goal of improving the lives of children and families," (in Blank & Lombardi, 1991). Many are re-focusing attention to this basic, human level and posing some real challenges to human service professionals.

Charles Bruner points out that "collaborations occur among people, not institutions." Collaboration is only a means to an end, a process where people work together toward shared goals they cannot achieve by acting alone (Bruner, 1991). Several experts on collaboration remind us that the people we most need to actively involve as key players in the process are the very children, families, and communities we hope to help. In their article on community-based collaborations, Chaskin and Richman (1992) note that "if we see the planning, promoting,

and provision of the full range of children's services and opportunities as the responsibility of the community...that responsibility can become a vehicle for enriching (or even creating) community." National child policy expert Sid Gardner (1990) also notes, "community is the level at which real partnerships need to be negotiated...the community level of collaboration is where it all happens." There is a clear shift taking place here, one in which the community owns and drives the process. "Trusting a community to help itself," Gardner emphasizes, "and equipping it to do so, can release a storehouse of energy that will be one of the most important social policy resources of the 1990s."

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Along with this clear emphasis to involve and empower families and communities to help themselves comes the need to build on their capacities, skills, and assets, rather than to focus primarily on their deficits, weaknesses, and problems. Community development experts McKnight and Kretzmann use this capacity-oriented approach in their work, noting that communities develop only when local people are committed to investing themselves and their resources in the effort. "Communities have never been built upon their deficiencies," but upon "mobilizing the capacities and assets of a people and a place," (McKnight & Kretzmann, n.d.). They note that a map of community needs, though accurate, is only half the truth, and their Chicago-based Neighborhood Innovations Network offers tools to help communities create a different map of the same community, one capturing its strengths and capacities. It is this map, they argue, which a community "must rely on if it is to find the power to regenerate itself." Equally importantly, shifting our perspective in this way can help us to recognize and cultivate the strengths and capabilities of those we're trying to assist. Every community, no matter how devastated, has this foundation to build on.

Gardner likens community-building skills to those needed to help families, and notes that the best family resource programs and leaders use these to expand collaborations to the community level. Among the skills he cites are "identifying and building on strengths, valuing what is shared over what divides, and... recognizing interdependence while moving toward greater self-sufficiency," (Gardner, 1990). Since children, families, and communities are interconnected, Gardner notes, "a positive, non-deficit approach can be taken to [help] communities, just as it can in helping families. Finding the strength in a community is the critical first step to community-based prevention programs."

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Even as we are challenged to promote collaborations that communities own and drive, and that focus on individual and

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family strengths, those in youth development tell us that the risk-reduction focus of so many of our collaborative efforts could prove inadequate. As youth development expert Karen Pittman explains:

> "Preventing high risk behaviors is not enough to ensure that youth are ready to assume the responsibilities and challenges of adulthood. Moreover, there is increasing evidence that the high risk behaviors that have garnered so much public and political concern cannot be reduced without...addressing the broader and more positive issue of youth development....Those youth who have skills and goals and have adequate family, peer, and community supports and opportunities to contribute, are much less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors than those who lack these skills and supports," (Pittman, 1992).

Pittman thus advocates "a widespread conceptual shift from thinking that youth problems are the principle barrier to youth development to thinking that youth development is the most effective strategy for the prevention of youth problems."

Noted youth advocate and promoter of youth/adult collaborations, William Lofquist, also reminds us that "only when adults view and respect young people as resources from the time of their birth are we likely to create organizational and youth opportunity system cultures that in fact promote the well-being of young people." (Lofquist, 1989). These youth experts point out that our role is not to fix kids' problems or to treat them as recipients or objects of youth programs; it is to provide them with ample opportunities *today* to develop their competencies so they can meet their own needs to contribute and be connected to a coherent, caring community (Gardner, 1992, Lofquist, 1989, Pittman, 1991).

These perspectives form the contours of a new paradigm that challenges collaborating service professionals: getting community ownership, not just representation; developing and utilizing people's strengths, capacities, and assets, not targeting and treating their deficiencies, weaknesses, and problems; and moving beyond risks to actively engage children and develop their competencies. And this paradigm's great expectations are quickly rendering obsolete our perceived goals, roles, and responsibilities, and the conceptual framework of service integration to fight fragmentation which drives them.

This new paradigm is forcing us to revisit the ultimate vision guiding our collaborative efforts. For if we are serious about prevention, then our ultimate vision lies beyond integrated service delivery, improved outcomes, and risk reduction. Our ultimate vision will be of children, families, and communities that are healthy, empowered, self-sustaining, and self-helping, not dependent, but independent and interdependent.

'Our ultimate vision will be of children, families, and communities that are healthy, empowered, self-sustaining, and self-helping, not dependent, but independent and interdependent.'

Collaborators who seek to involve and empower children, families, and communities in achieving this vision are more likely to succeed if they infuse their collaborative efforts with resiliency principles. Resiliency-based collaborations will focus as much on building protection as eradicating risks, on utilizing strengths and assets as treating problems, and on cultivating healthy attributes as discouraging dangerous behaviors.

THE RESILIENCY FRAMEWORK: BUILDING ENVIRONMENTS RICH IN PROTECTION

Resiliency describes that quality in children who, though exposed to significant stress and adversity in their lives, do not succumb to the school failure, substance abuse, mental health and juvenile delinquency problems they are at greater risk of experiencing. How do these "at-risk" kids sidestep the predicted negative outcomes and move safely into a healthy adulthood? Over many years, researchers have identified protective factors present in these kids' family, school, and community environments. These factors foster the development of resilient attributes, which in turn help kids successfully avoid, minimize, or overcome risks.

In her synthesis of the resiliency literature, Benard (1991) describes the key protective factors found in these kids' families, schools, and communities:

1) Having a caring and supportive relationship with at least one person;

2) Communicating consistently clear, high expectations to the child; and

3) Providing ample opportunities for the child to participate in and contribute meaningfully to his or her social environment.

The presence of these protective factors helps foster the growth of a resilient child — which according to Benard is one who is socially competent, with problem-solving skills and a

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sense of his or her own autonomy, purpose, and future. These resilient attributes are more likely to develop in kids whose environments have adults and youth who provide these protective factors. And while we know only too well that adding risk factors multiplies the likelihood of health-compromising choices, we need also to remember that adding protective factors — via families, schools, and religious and youth-serving organizations throughout the community — counteracts that likelihood with equal power (Benson, 1990, Blyth, 1992). Even substance abuse prevention efforts which are primarily risk-focused can better achieve their goals by incorporating protective factors in their strategies (Hawkins et. al., 1992).

To help us meet the challenges placed on our collaborative efforts and realize our vision of involved families within empowered communities that together bring up resilient children, the resiliency framework, with its protective factors and resilient attributes, offers collaborators significant advantages:

1. It necessarily makes our collaborations *inclusive* by recognizing that all adults within a child's environment have an active, critical role to play. Moreover, their understanding and owning this role genuinely empowers them. Collaborations that foster resiliency are more than client-friendly systems for multiple service consumption; they're user-driven processes that promote protection and nurture resilient attributes. Service professionals can facilitate that process and encourage that ownership by modeling the very same protective factors with their newfound partners.

2. It offers a compelling metaphor to guide our collaborations — that of working together to build environments rich in protection for children. The emphasis is on *the environment*, not on fixing kids' behaviors, or on doing anything to them. Indeed, kids are not responsible for becoming resilient; adults are responsible for working together to provide kids with caring and support, high expectations, and opportunities to participate in meaningful activities (Benard et. al., 1992). To the extent that adults do this, they encourage the natural development of resilient attributes in kids. Thus resiliency is an outcome of collaboration.

3. It does not orient our collaborations around deficits and risks, but instead recognizes and builds on participants' *strengths and capacities*. This positive focus can move participants away from the pessimism and burn-out which often plague collaborators who see themselves in an endless struggle against deficits and risks. As Peter Benson (1990)

notes, "Deficits are not destiny. With the right configuration of external and internal assets, the potential negative effects of adversity can be neutralized." This positive outlook also helps service workers to avoid relating to kids and families with the low expectations that can unintentionally engender a learned helplessness.

Not only can a community in collaboration foster resiliency in kids; the very same protective factors can be used to enhance the collaborative process itself. For successful collaborators — like people building healthy communities — will care for and support one another, have high expectations of each other, and give each other significant opportunities to participate and contribute meaningfully to the collaboration's objectives. In this way, collaborators build an environment of protection for each other. As Gibbs and Bennett (1990) emphasize, this mutual support among collaborators can in turn become a vital force to "reweave the fabric of community."

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MAKING RESILIENCY-BASED COMMUNITY COLLABORATIONS A REALITY

Collaborations that promote protective factors to foster resiliency in kids are more than theoretical constructs. Preventionists can draw from several tools and programs which are currently being used in communities across the country to actively engage families, schools, community organizations, and youth themselves in building environments rich in protection. While there are dozens of models to choose from, we focus here on those tools and programs which begin with strengths and capacities, actively engage children, youth, and families, and build primarily on protective factors to confront risks. We'll highlight some of these now, and list contacts for further information in Appendix A.

As mentioned earlier, McKnight and Kretzmann offer an effective set of tools to map a community's building blocks for local development. Their community capacity map allows a community to uncover and catalog its own strengths and assets, and prioritizes these by the extent to which they are located within and largely under the residents' control. For example, the primary building block is composed of individual and organizational assets, including the skills, talents and experience of residents, personal income, individual businesses, and various civic, cultural, and religious organizations.

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Inverting the needs assessment so often used to define a community, they offer a capacity inventory instrument which collaborators can use to orient their efforts toward a more positive perspective which includes the community. This inventory tool is currently being widely used by Chicago public housing resident management councils to identify and employ the talents of housing project residents. It is also being used by community foundations and service councils in Seattle and Honolulu, and evaluated in neighborhood development projects sponsored by Amoco Foundation in Denver, Houston, Atlanta, and Chicago.

The Neighborhood Innovations Network where McKnight and Kretzmann work offers several other tools and "primers" to link schools and other neighborhood institutions, capture resources for local empowerment, and include local culture and media in collaborative efforts.

One of the most comprehensive tools for creating collaborations which foster resiliency in kids is the Making the Grade program. Developed and disseminated by the National Collaboration for Youth and the 4H Youth Development Program, MTG engages youth and adults as partners in a collaborative process that empowers communities to assume responsibility for creating and maintaining safe, nurturing environments for young people. The program, solidly based on research in resiliency, community action, and youth development, has been implemented in over 400 urban and rural communities nationwide since 1989, and offers some very practical generic tools, including a Town Meeting Guide and Community Workbook. The Workbook provides step-by-step guidance in capacity assessment, strategic planning and problem resolution, and offers a wealth of additional tools and resources for maximally involving all community members to develop youth potential. MTG also publishes a newsletter that documents community-wide collaborative success stories and offers contacts in what is becoming a key network to a national movement.

Perhaps no more compelling support for building collaborations based on a resiliency framework exists than the work done by community psychologist, Roger Mills. Mills's "health realization/community empowerment" approach is premised on the belief that everyone is capable of functioning at higher levels of well-being, common sense, positive motivation, and self-esteem when they understand how to access these states of mind in themselves, and when conditions in the educational, social, and cultural environment are conducive to bringing these potentials to the surface. A pilot-demonstration project, the Modello/

Homestead Gardens Intervention program in Dade County, Florida, has clearly demonstrated the efficacy of collaborative, community development efforts built on these premises.

In a 1987 Dade County Grand Jury report, the Modello Housing Project was described as a "showcase of the feminization of poverty and of an ingrained intergenerational cycle of welfare dependence, deviance, drugs, and crime" (in Benard and Lorio, 1991). More than 65 percent of the households sold and/or used illegal drugs, the teen pregnancy and school dropout rates were well over 50 percent, and child abuse and/or neglect was endemic. Less than three years later, with Mills's program serving 142 families and 604 youth, the community had become a changed place. Pre- and post-evaluations showed significantly improved parent-child relationships in 87 percent of the families tested and a 75 percent reduction in delinquency and dysfunctional school behaviors. The number of failing junior high students dropped from 64 percent to only one student; and the majority of parents returned to school, enrolled in job training, or began working. Drug trafficking decreased by over 65 percent and substance abuse problems dropped by over 50 percent (Mills, 1990).

On the face of it, we can credit the program's success to its comprehensiveness, to the use of several sound prevention strategies and the involvement of several systems — training residents as trainers, parent training, youth and family counseling, job development, community organization, school climate improvement, teacher training, and inter-agency coordination and outreach. However, as in any successful program, the "whats" are not as important as the "hows." The central focus of the Modello/Homestead Gardens intervention was the empowerment of the residents. "The realization of their own well-being and potential for changing themselves, their families and their community was the key to every component of this project" (Mills, 1991).

A testament to the power of this approach, which incorporated the attributes of local ownership, a strength focus, and a framework of positive development, is that the *residents* of the Modello housing project took the leadership in expanding this program to a neighboring housing project, Homestead Gardens. Furthermore, feedback from the agency staff and school personnel who participated in the Project training clearly underscores the point that a resiliency/empowerment perspective is regenerative and energizing, a sharp contrast to the burn-out and pessimism all too common in helping professionals. The Modello/Homestead Intervention Project is currently being

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replicated in Oakland, California, where staff from the Oakland Housing Authority, Police Department, and County Probation office will work together with the residents of the Coliseum Gardens Housing Project. Program components are being implemented at other sites in California, as well as in Honolulu, Hawaii; Bronx, New York; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Aurora, Colorado; and Hillsboro, Florida.

RESILIENCY AND THE SPIRIT OF COLLABORATION

Collaborating service professionals are being challenged not just to work across agency boundaries to improve service delivery, but to expand collaborations to the community level, facilitate the community's ownership of the process, and actively involve families and youth by drawing on and developing their strengths and capacities. Collaborators who base their efforts on the conceptual framework of resiliency will be better able to meet these challenges. In resiliency-based collaborations, all of us are required to work together, within and across families, schools, and community organizations, to build environments that protect kids by developing their social competence, problem-solving skills, and a sense of their own autonomy, purpose, and future.

Community-wide collaboration based on protective factors is not just the best way to promote resiliency; it may be the only way to create an environment sufficiently rich in protection for kids facing the enormous stresses and risks of growing up in present-day American society. Resiliency-based collaborations are still systemically oriented, yet keep us from losing sight of the human dimension essential to any effective collaborative endeavor. The guiding principles of resiliency are powerful precisely because they are as basic to healthy human development as they are intuitively appealing. As service professionals dedicated to prevention, each of us can promote protection through caring and supporting each other, relating with high expectations, and providing ample opportunities to contribute. These very principles embody the spirit of collaboration, and are surely necessary to promote resiliency through protection and achieve our ultimate vision.

APPENDIX A.

1. Among the many tools, guides, and publications available from the Neighborhood Innovations Network are the community capacity map, a capacity inventory questionnaire, and a primer of 31 sample projects for school-community collaborations for neighborhood development. Other publications focus on innovations in education, economic development and planning, culture and communications, and human service alternatives.

   Neighborhood Innovations Network
   Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research
   Northwestern University
   2040 Sheridan Road
   Evanston, IL 60208-4100
   Contact: John L. McKnight, Principal Investigator
   John Kretzmann, Project Director
   (708) 491-3518
   FAX (708) 491-9916

2. The Making The Grade Community Workbook, Town Meeting Guide, detailed Collaboration Manual, and related materials are available from the National 4H Council.

   National 4H Council Supply Service
   7100 Connecticut Avenue
   Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815-4999
   Contact: Peggy Adkins, Julie Grieb
   (301) 961-2934
   FAX (301) 961-2937

3. For information on the Modello/Homestead Gardens Public Housing Intervention Project, and workshops in health realization/community empowerment for service professionals, contact:

   R.C. Mills and Associates, Inc.
   1103 Gulf Way
   St. Petersburg, Florida 33706
   Contact: Roger Mills, Clytee L. Mills
   (813) 367-8745

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